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The MUSICAL AMATEUR

CONCERNING CHURCH CHOIRS.

II.



NEXT month I promised at the close of my article to consider the various chorus choirs feasible for use in church, and I will therefore at once proceed to redeem that promise.

I shall mention, first, a kind of chorus somewhat in vogue in this country, but more common in England—i.e., a body of children of both sexes, usually chosen from the Sunday-school. This produces an effect not at all objectionable when the children are carefully trained, but has the serious drawback of rendering all but the simplest music out of the question. It is also necessary, in order to render this body of untrained voices at all pleasant, that the mass should be very large; not less than fifty, at any rate, and if more than that so much the better. I might mention here one of the objections raised by musical people against congregational singing, and dispose of it. It is urged that in every congregation there are many voices unpleasant in quality, naturally out of tune, and possessed by those whose ears are not sufficiently acute to enable them to overcome this inherent fault. I grant this fact, unhesitatingly; but I also declare that these voices can only produce an unpleasant effect when the congregation is very small, or when only a part of the people sing. In a large mass of voices all individual peculiarities of tone-color are lost; and those which are out of tune are (by a natural law well-known in acoustics) drawn into tune by the tendency of vibrations to synchronize themselves, if I may be allowed to use the expression. I remember once at an open air service of the Rev. Mr. Spurgeon's, in England, hearing "Old Hundred" sung by twelve thousand people. So magnificent a musical effect I never heard elsewhere. It was an overwhelming ocean of sacred song. I, for one, could not sing; I could only stand and listen, while the tears filled my eyes and rolled down my cheeks. I never expect to be again so impressed until the time when I shall hear the mighty host before the Throne singing the praises of the Almighty. It is because of this natural law that I say your choir of untrained children must be large. There must be enough to swallow and smooth such unpleasant and unformed voices as will always creep in among them.

Another possible chorus choir is one formed exclusively of adult male voices. But this (setting aside the difficulty of its formation, from the rarity in this country of high tenor voices) is open to two serious objections. The effect soon becomes monotonous; and it will be necessary to have all the music for such a choir especially arranged and the parts copied, which involves considerable expense. I never saw but one service written for male voices, and I cannot now recall by whom that was; if my memory serves me right, however, it was a very poor specimen of church music.

We come next to the volunteer mixed chorus; female voices for soprano and alto, male voices for tenor and bass. This is, with one exception, the finest possible choir. All fields of music, excepting one, are open to it. The more modern school of English church music, the massive choruses of the great oratorios, the smooth and flowing compositions of the later German writers, are all at its command. Its harmonies will be massive, its unisons sublime (remember, I am writing with a view to a *large* chorus, certainly not less than thirty voices), and the motets of Bach, for example, written as they frequently are in eight pure parts, will, when done by this mass of voices, be found to contain something grander, loftier, and more soul-inspiring than any mere melody. Such a choir should, for chanting, be divided into halves, each of which should, on alternate verses, respond to the other. In the hymns, in which the whole congregation should join, this choir should, like the people, sing the melody in unison;

with such a body of sound for a guiding element, it will be found comparatively easy to break up the vile habit, now in force, of singing all tunes, jubilant and funereal alike, at a slower than snail's pace. The days when a long face and a snuffle were considered necessary parts of religion are happily passing away; let our church music partake in this proper and sensible change. Religious jubilation, if sincere, will not be content with the utterance of one word of praise per second. This remark as to a spirited singing of jubilant tunes applies with excessive force to the modern English school of hymnology, the tunes of which (by such men as Barnby, Dykes, and Stainer) demand to be sung at reasonably rapid speed. It is no small proof of their thoroughly church-like spirit and structure that this class of composition will bear the most rapid performance without deteriorating into jigs, polkas, or galops. Try the same experiment with most of the Lowell Mason, Hastings, Perkins, Bradbury, Sankey and Bliss music of this country, and you will obtain as pretty a little set of short dance and negro tunes as any country band leader or ball musician could wish.

To lead and sustain a chorus choir of this or of any kind, you must have a large and powerful organ, played by a man who is a thorough church musician. There are many fine organists who are entirely unfitted for a position in church, in consequence of their ignorance of, or lack of interest in, this special branch of music. All attempts at display on the part of the organist should be immediately and firmly stopped; his opening voluntary should be of a character to prepare the minds of his hearers for the service in which they are to take part; his closing one should continue and deepen the impression that service has made. On no account should interludes be permitted between the stanzas of a hymn. In churches where the hymn is closed by a doxology, a brief interlude (in the style of the hymn) may be allowed—an interlude just sufficiently long to enable choir and congregation to turn to the doxology they have to sing. If the organist desires to display his powers as an executant, let him give a concert; the church service is for worship, prayer, and praise; and all its exercises, musical or otherwise, should tend to one of these ends.

I come now to the choir of choirs, the perfect musical organization for use in church. This is a large and well-trained choir of boys and men—boys for treble and alto, men for tenor and bass. A good choir is eighteen trebles, two altos, four tenors and six basses. In this choir, the adult portion must read music at sight with facility. This accomplishment is of more importance than the possession of a phenomenal voice, as solos are not wanted, save on very exceptional occasions. The boys should have five rehearsals a week, the full choir one. The boys should also read music at sight; but they will learn this readily, if they be properly taught. I never found a boy yet whom I could not, with one half hour at each of my five weekly rehearsals, teach to read music well in ten weeks. The boys must be taught how to use their voices. The trebles must not be permitted to use the so-called "chest" voice at all. The two altos, using the "chest" voice (which is tremendously strong and telling in boys) will be found quite sufficient to balance the other parts. It is a fact, although not generally known, that the voices of boy trebles, if properly trained, are infinitely higher than those of female soprani. I never hesitate to write up to high A, or B flat, in choruses for boy-choirs; and I have had more than one boy soloist who took a high E flat with perfect ease and lovely tone. All depends upon the manner in which the boys' voices are handled; and it must be understood from the outset that the manner in which they must be trained is entirely different from that used for female voices.

There are several reasons why boys are preferable to women in church choirs; let me mention a few. First, as regards quality of voice. Boys' voices have a seraphic and celestial quality, never found even in the purest and most perfectly trained female voice; a complete absence of passion, a chaste coldness, which ad-

mirably fits them for church work, and makes a choir of boys' voices sound as we may imagine a choir of angels would. Next, they sing in better tune than women. There are certain times when any woman will sing out of tune, no matter how excellent her vocal method. Last, and not least, all temptations to elaborate solo work in the Italian style are absolutely done away with. A boy's voice not being capable of "die-away sentimentality," there is no danger of bastard opera making its way into a church where boys are used. This choir of boys and men can do all that the mixed choir can and should do, and more; for, in addition to the music I have mentioned as being in the power of the mixed choir, there are also all the works of the ancient English church writers, Boyce, Orlando Gibbons, Jeremiah Clark, Dr. Greene, Purcell, and Tallis, and of the old and great Italian school, Palestrina and his compeers.

There is a curious difference in result between women's and boys' voices, a difference greatly in favor of the boys; for while boys can render effectively all the church-like things which women can, they can also give (and make fine effect with) a large class of music which has, with female voices, no effect at all. The music of the composers I have mentioned in the paragraph above is, when rendered by a mixed choir, tame and uninteresting; when rendered by boys it becomes descriptive and beautiful. The reason of this must be found in the fact that there are certain intervals (notably, the rising interval of a fourth) which have, when sung by boys, a wonderful effect; an effect which is totally absent when women sing them. These composers, writing for boys (or, in the case of the old Italian writers, for artificial soprani whose voices greatly resembled those of boys), studied, and largely introduced these intervals; making the beauty of their works depend greatly upon the peculiarities of the boy-voice. As a natural consequence, their performance by women is very unsatisfactory, and does not pay for the work spent upon them.

I should like to enlarge upon the usual ridiculous position of the choir in a church, placed in a gallery behind the people and singing to the backs of their heads; but must not occupy my space with that point. It must suffice for me to say that another reason for advocating the use of boys, is the fact that they can be placed in the proper position in front of the people (in an Episcopal Church, in the chancel), where, leading the musical, as the minister leads the spoken part of the worship, they can be both seen and heard. Of course the organ must be near them.

A few words now as to the proper music for these different kinds of choirs, in addition to what I have already said upon that subject. For a choir of mixed children, use largely Gregorian chants and plain but massive hymn tunes. Permit no attempts at singing in parts, either among the children or in the congregation. Many children will manufacture an alto, if you will let them; this alto being always in thirds or sixths below the melody, the result is dreadful, and is quite enough to drive any sensitive person out of the building where it is done. If any irreligion be claimed as appertaining to a hasty exit for this cause, it certainly lies at the doors of those who permit the evil; torture is not supposed to form part of modern civilized religions, though musical torture too frequently does.

With the male chorus I have said all that is necessary as to music. Such an organization can never become common or long-lived. With the mixed chorus may be done all the kinds of music I have already mentioned when speaking of that organization. One or two of the works of Mosenthal, of S. P. Warren, and of Dudley Buck will also pass muster as respectable church music in spite of their superabundance of solo work. Observe that this implies nothing against their worth as musical compositions; I am viewing them strictly with regard to their fitness for use in church service, but they need to be carefully selected from the rather large amount of writing these gentlemen have done. About one-tenth of what they have written is perhaps appropriate for use in worship. But with your mixed choir,

eschew totally all the rest of the American so-called "church" music; it is the "abomination of (Italian Opera) desolation," wherever it does not happen to have descended into the regions of negro minstrelsy.

With your boys use what I have suggested, but have nothing to do with any American writer except Dr. H. S. Cutler, whose exquisite volume of Trinity Anthems is a lasting monument to his excellence as a church musician. I do not hesitate to call the "Te Deum" in E flat, which holds the first position in this book, the equal of any "Te Deum," ancient or modern; and the anthems are of supreme excellence.

Long as this article is, I must add a word about chanting. Chanting should always be done responsively, as I have said when speaking of mixed chorus choirs. The first word of the second verse should be commenced before the last word of the first is quite finished; there should never be a cessation of sound, except just before the "Gloria Patri," which all sing together. The usual fault in chanting is that the recitation is given much too rapidly (reducing this part of the chant to a gabbling race), and the mediation and cadence much too slowly. All choir people will know what I mean by "recitation," "mediation," and "cadence." The words during the recitation should be spoken with the deliberation of a good reader, *and the mediation and cadence should be sung so rapidly that the words which come in them are spoken as quickly as are the words of the recitation.* To illustrate further, the mediation and cadence should not be thought of as being separate "parts" of the chant; they should simply be considered as *inflections* on certain syllables, which syllables are not to be in any way varied in time from those which go before or come after.

C. F.



On the heels of the "Damnation of Faust," produced under Dr. Damrosch's direction, we have had Meyerbeer's "Struensee" music, under the conductorship of G. Carlberg, and (from the same leader) a "Triumphal Symphony" of Hugo Ulrich. Both

are novelties on this side of the water. The American world has not lost much in not knowing the symphony, and has not gained much by hearing it, except the knowledge that no one will care greatly to hear it again. But the "Struensee" music is a great addition to our concert repertoire, and ought to be given again; one hearing is not sufficient for a full enjoyment or appreciation of its beauties. It should be noted that the Overture and Polonaise from the "Struensee" have been done here more than once by Theodore Thomas.

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THE "Struensee" music is a series of detached numbers, illustrating, musically, certain incidents and situations in the tragedy of that name, written by Michael Beer. At its performance under Carlberg, Miss Genevieve L. Stebbins recited (and very finely) some poetry by Hugh Craig, which gave sufficient of the story to connect and explain the different musical numbers. In addition to the orchestra, "Struensee" enlisted the services of a tenor soloist and a male chorus. The soloist was Christian Fritsch, and the selection of this gentleman for this work was a happy one. His vibrant voice, of decidedly martial color, was just what was needed for the national hymn he had to sing (not "Columbia"), and penetrated easily through the orchestra, although he had to sing from a side room. The chorus was also invisible; it came very near to being inaudible also. I should judge that there was about a man and a half on each part, and that the half man always sang out of tune.

* * *

It is pleasant to see an amateur pianist enter successfully the public lists. Every amateur who does so

gives additional proof that there are a few faithful students even in American private circles, and helps to assure the earnest musician that his efforts may not all be in vain, though he can frequently see no result from them. The latest amateur pianist to step forward has been Mme. S. A. Rachau, who played the Mozart Concerto in D minor, using the Reinecke Cadenzas. It was the first time this lady had ever played with orchestra; it is needless, therefore, to say that she was excessively nervous. This nervousness marred the first half of the first movement; not by diminishing the brilliant clarity of her execution, but by robbing her performance of the repose necessary for good (by which I mean well-considered and finished) phrasing. Before reaching the Cadenza, however, Mme. Rachau had sufficiently recovered herself to give it a most intelligent and satisfactory reading. In the Andante all her nervousness seemed to return; the consequence was that it lacked somewhat in "legato," and in that lovely tone which can only be coaxed from a piano; hitting the notes never brings it. But in the last movement, which was taken at a very rapid (though not too rapid) "tempo," the lady was evidently at her best; the passages seemed to glitter, they were so brilliant and distinct, and the last Cadenza and concluding runs brought the Concerto to a most triumphant close, and drew from the very critical audience present vociferous and evidently spontaneous applause.

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THREE performances of the "Damnation of Faust" have succeeded largely in defining public opinion about the work and its production. The work is a marvellous piece of descriptive writing; strongest where great effects, or devilish or bizarre results, are needed, weakest where pure melody is wanted. Berlioz was not melodic; he can paint you any picture he pleases with his wonderful mastery of orchestral coloring, but the simple ballad form eludes him. Margaret's "King of Thule," and her mournful plaint after Faust has forsaken her, are therefore the least satisfactory numbers in the score. Several people have, in my hearing, endeavored to "go wild" over these numbers (especially the "King of Thule"), but without much success. I have wickedly asked some of these hard-working enthusiasts to give me the melody of the "King of Thule." Many of those whom I have approached have attended all the performances, and a rehearsal or two besides, yet none could remember it. Margaret, when singing the "King of Thule," is supposed to be singing an old "people's song;" but the songs of the people, no matter how old, are never too crooked to be caught by ear; if they were, they would never have become "people's songs."

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THE orchestra at the "Damnation of Faust" played excellently, the chorus sang more nearly with absolute perfection than any chorus I have heard in America; Dr. Damrosch conducted with more repose and self-control than usual, but the soloists—alas! Faust was nasal, and frequently inaudible, and he and the orchestra started out with a severe difference of opinion regarding the pitch, which difference was never settled. Margaret was as cold as a stone, utterly devoid of any conception of her part, and, like Faust, frequently inaudible; when she *could* be heard, she was at least in tune. Mephistopheles was by all odds the best of the three, and would have been fine but for the fact that, within the last two years, the voice of the gentleman who sang this part has been losing its color and resonance. He used to have a large, warm, "portwine colored" voice; but it is now, though still large, cold and of a dead-gray color.

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BEFORE this reaches the eyes of my readers the news that Theodore Thomas has severed his connection with the Cincinnati College of Music will be old. I mention it principally for the pleasure of saying, "I told you so," as I did. I prophesied confidently that Mr. Thomas would not stay his five years out; and mentioned three as the utmost limit of his stay. It always gratifies a prophet to see his prophecies fulfilled. I knew Mr. Thomas altogether too well to believe that any pecuniary inducements would compel him to remain in a situation where, nominally the head, he had a director overruling him.

CARYL FLORIO.

Art Publications.

THE FIGURE PAINTERS OF HOLLAND. By Lord Ronald Gower. New York: Scribner & Welford.—The names of Terborch, Van Ostade and Wouwerman have become so familiar during the past month to all who have read the newspaper reports of the San Donato sale that this volume of the "Great Artists" series will be eagerly read by persons desiring some substantial information about the time-honored figure painters of Holland. It is certainly one of the most interesting of the series. Biographical sketches are given of Gerard Van Houthorst, Adriaan Brouwer, Gerard Terborch, Adriaan and Isack Jansz (Van Ostade), Jan Steen, Gabriel Metsu, Nicolaas Maes, Jan ver Meer, Pieser de Hooch, Frans van Mieris and Caspar Netscher, with portraits of some of the artists and illustrations of their works. Brouwer is represented by his picture, "The Toper," one of his characteristic pot-house delineations; Terborch by "The Lute Player," in the Cassel Gallery, and "Paternal Advice" (?) in the Amsterdam Museum, both pictures apparently having for their prime object the introduction of a woman with a satin gown, in the painting of which this artist has probably never been equalled. The picture called "Paternal Advice" is evidently misnamed, as Lord Gower suggests. "We cannot but think," says the author, "that he (Goethe, who, noticing the picture in his 'Wahlverwandschaften,' made it tell a pathetic story of parental admonition to a wayward daughter) has magnified a very clever portrait group into a work of pathos, and colored with his poetical sense a group in which the painter had only wished to show his marvellous power of rendering the quality and texture of a white satin gown on a graceful female form, relieved by the black dress of another lady, and by the buff jerkin of a cavalier, who neither appears old enough to be the father of the lady in the satin gown, nor does his attitude or his expression convey in the least the idea of correction." At the end of the volume are given lists of the principal paintings of the Dutch figure painters.

SCRIBNER'S MONTHLY FOR APRIL is unusually strong in its illustrations. The engravings of the serial, "Success with Small Fruits," are generally admirable, and this month they are particularly so. It would be difficult to find a more charming bit of wood engraving than Mr. Whitney's interpretation of Mr. Gibson's "Noonday Under the Trees." It is a gem. "She Waited in Vain," drawn by Mary Hallock Foote, is prettily composed, and is clean and unaffectedly cut. There is a noticeable decrease this month of woodcuts with the muddy imitation oil painting effects, the defense of which has so well advertised the magazine. There is one on the first page, however, by Mr. Marsh, in which a clever drawing of Mr. Blum has been thoroughly subjugated to the Procrustean requirements of this peculiar school.

ST. NICHOLAS FOR APRIL contains several articles of as much interest to adults as to children. A brief account of Pompeii, by Margaret Bertha Wright, with its many woodcuts, is one of these. Artists and others will thank the publishers for the finely executed full-page engraving of "A Burial at Sea," Mr. Henry Bacon's much praised picture at the Paris Salon last year. The half page of letter-press that accompanies it is charmingly written, and adds to the enjoyment of the sentiment of the illustration. "The Major's Big-Talk Stories," short Munchausen narratives, by F. Blake Crofton, are begun in this number. The drawing of the boys and the bear is very funny.

THE ART JOURNAL FOR MARCH is more than usually attractive. The steel plates are: "Gamblers," by A. Paoletti, representing two Italian gamblers playing cards; "Sheep Pastures," by B. W. Leader, charmingly engraved by Willmore, and the statuary group, "The Guiding Angel," by L. A. Malenpre. The latter is a tame composition, in which the guiding angel, who is walking or hovering by the side of child, is required by the exigencies of the sculptor's design to rest one foot upon a piece of rock, which is nearly as high as the child's waist. To advance another step the angel will have to make a jump or use her wings. A valuable article is Mrs. Susan B. Carter's well considered and carefully illustrated paper concerning "Ceilings and Dados." In "Sketches and Studies," by American artists, the oil painting imitation effect so dear to the new school of wood engravers is employed with some degree of propriety. It is not pretended, for instance, that Mr. J. C. Beckwith's charming idyl, "A Summer Afternoon," is anything more than a study. But just such a sketch as this, photographically reduced to half the size, is often published in "Scribner's Magazine" as a finished illustration.

THE AMERICAN ART REVIEW FOR MARCH pays more attention to contemporary art matters than hitherto. Facsimiles of pen and ink drawings, by contributors to the Salmagundi Sketch Club and the American Water Color Society exhibitions, constitute a good proportion of the illustrations of the number. There are two good etchings—"Negro Huts at Wilmington, N. C.," by J. M. Falconer, and "Village Street in France, with a Flock of Sheep," by J. Foxcroft Cole—but they are badly printed. W. J. Linton gives the first chapter of his "History of Wood Engraving in America," with a portrait of the venerable Alexander Anderson, well engraved by Elias J. Whitney, and many process reproductions of woodcuts by Anderson. Charles C. Perkins maintains his point in his discussion with W. W. Story, that to infer that the ancients understood and practised the art of making moulds and casts from life or from the round is *not* "utterly unwarrantable."

We are indebted to Mr. S. P. Avery for three large and remarkably good photographs of Mr. Bridgman's pictures now on exhibition at the Avery gallery.